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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE TO AUSTRIA: ASEAN EFFORTS TO PROMOTE  
DEMOCRATIC REFORM IN BURMA

REF: STATE 29795

Classified By: Economic-Political Counselor Gregory E. Phillips

¶1. (SBU) EconPolCouns delivered reftel demarche on March 16 to Austrian MFA Asia Director Nikolaus Scherk.

¶2. (C) Scherk said there had been some sentiment among the Asians to avoid an explicit reference to Burma/Myanmar in the chairman's statement concluding the March 14-15 Nuremberg EU-ASEAN Ministerial. However, he said, the German chair had insisted that the chairman's statement be an accurate reflection of the discussion. The Germans added that the chairman's statement was not a negotiated document in any event. As a result, the chairman's statement included pointed language on Burma.

¶2. (C) Scherk said he found it interesting that none of the ASEAN countries defended Burma during the discussion. Even the Chinese, who in the past might have said that the situation in Burma was off-limits to discussion as an internal matter, did not do so on this occasion. Instead, the Chinese only asked that the Burmese Foreign Minister have an opportunity to respond. Scherk said the Burmese statement only rehearsed arguments about how difficult it was to manage tensions in a multi-ethnic state.

¶3. (C) In general, Scherk said the EU-ASEAN meetings are "getting better and better." He said the discussions were lively and full of real content. There were significant points of convergence, although on some issues (notably the Middle East) there was less agreement than on others (such as Afghanistan).

McCaw